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## Pentagon Probes Honduran Murders

**T**he Pentagon is secretly investigating the disturbing possibility that dozens of suspected leftists were murdered by Honduran military officers in a U.S.-funded program.

Sources in Tegucigalpa told my associate Jon Lee Anderson there is no evidence that U.S. officials were aware of the executions. In fact, Honduran sources emphasized that Americans involved in the program were deliberately kept in the dark. That is one of the questions being pursued by the Defense Department.

The U.S.-funded program was supposed to curb the flow of arms from the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua to leftist rebels in El Salvador. As such, the program was related to the CIA-run covert operation begun in 1981 to support the anti-Sandinista "contras." Arms interdiction was the justification the Reagan administration gave when it persuaded Congress to put up the original \$19 million for the secret war in Nicaragua.

Unlike the CIA's clandestine operations, U.S. aid to the Honduran government was aboveboard. The need to prevent "export of armed subversion" by Nicaragua has repeatedly been cited by the White House to explain the massive U.S. military presence in Honduras.

A reliable source in Tegucigalpa said there have been several cases of suspected leftists who "disappeared" after detention by Honduran officers in charge of the arms-interdiction program.

One source said that in the last month the Defense Department's investigation has focused on charges that the Special Operations Command, an

elite Honduran counterinsurgency force, was "involved in some of the disappearances."

Another source, a former special-operations member, told my associate that the outfit also operated "safe houses" where it conducted interrogations of suspected leftists. Some of those arrested by the unit for interrogation "later ended up under earth," the source said.

In addition, this Honduran source said, the Special Operations Command trained and equipped some private, anti-communist paramilitary squads that operated on their own. "They did some of our dirty work for us," the former agent said.

He emphatically absolved U.S. military advisers of complicity in the disappearances of suspected leftists. Though the Americans sometimes joined in the interrogations, he said, they were intentionally kept ignorant of the illegal executions.

"Our officers don't trust the Americans," he said. The ex-agent implied that the Hondurans feared that if the American officers learned about the executions, they would feel compelled to report them to the Pentagon—and then it would leak to Congress and the news media, and U.S. funds for the Honduran military would be endangered.

Most observers on the scene agree that the arms-interdiction program in Honduras has succeeded. As early as 1982, sources said, arms shipments to Salvadoran rebels through Honduras had shrunk to a trickle. This would explain why the Reagan administration has changed its strategy and demanded that the Sandinistas cry "uncle!"

The arms-interdiction justification may no longer exist.